

October 27, 2009

Obey Announces Historic \$475 Million Effort to Clean Up the Great Lakes

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Seventh District Congressman Dave Obey (D-WI) announced that yesterday, the House and Senate Conference Committee for the FY2010 Interior Appropriations bill, “Approved an historic \$475 million down payment for the restoration of the Great Lakes.” The legislation, which the House and Senate will soon vote on for final approval, would fully fund the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative (GLRI) which was requested by the President and shepherded through Congress by Obey who chairs the House Appropriations Committee.

“Up until now, the approach to cleaning up the Great Lakes has been piecemeal. Now, we have a plan that uses the best possible science to comprehensively address the many problems that threaten the health and economy of the Great Lakes,” said Obey.

The health of the Great Lakes and its economy is threatened by contaminated sediment, non-point source pollution, aquatic invasive species, and habitat loss. According to some scientific views, the Great Lakes are at a tipping point. “Failure to protect and restore the lakes now would result in more serious consequences,” Obey said. “Invasive species alone cost the Great Lakes economy over \$200 million annually, making the control of invasive species paramount in restoration and recovery efforts of the region.” The GLRI is a culmination of work by over 1,500 federal, state, local, tribal and other stakeholders from the region, including the Council of Great Lakes Governors which is chaired by Wisconsin Governor Jim Doyle. The stakeholder groups spent years drafting the Great Lakes Regional Collaboration Strategy Report of 2005 which is the blueprint for how additional federal resources would be spent to address the many threats facing the Great Lakes.

In the 1970’s, after decades of neglect, areas of the Great Lakes were practically untouchable due to direct sewage discharges and other environmental pollution. At that time, the federal government invested \$41 billion nationally in wastewater treatment infrastructure through the Clean Water Act’s Construction Grants Program. This was the largest non-military public investment since the Interstate Highways System and the outcome of that effort was a dramatic improvement in the region’s quality of life. Obey said, “The job is not done, but there is a clear lesson: given a plan, public investment in environmental restoration can produce real, dramatic and visible benefits for the nation.”

The Great Lakes are an important national treasure and a vital economic resource. Over 40 million people rely on the lakes for drinking water which comprise one-fifth of the world’s fresh water. The Great Lakes Region is an important economic engine hosting one-third of the U.S. population, nearly 39% of all U.S./Canadian trade to the world, and is home to nineteen of the

world's best research universities.

As measured in Gross Domestic Product, the Great Lakes region represents the second largest economy in the world with over \$200 billion of economic activity generated per year from manufacturing, agriculture sales, and international shipping. In addition, 911,000 recreational boaters on the Great Lakes spend \$2.35 billion per year on boating trips, \$1.44 billion per year on boats and boating equipment and supplies, and that recreational activity creates 60,000 jobs with \$1.77 billion in personal income. "The Great Lakes increase the quality of life and the appreciation of our environment for countless Americans," Obey said.

"The conference report was approved yesterday by the Conference Committee and is expected to be approved by both the House and Senate and sent to the President later this week," Obey added.

#